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Delivered, by the Order and in the Presence of

T H E K I N G,

I N T H E

Assembly of the NOTABLES,

Held at Versailles the 22d of February, 1787.

By M. DE CALONNE,

Comptroller General of the Finances.

D U B L I N :

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M,DCC,LXXXVII.

The King's Speech

TO THE

ASSEMBLY OF NOTABLES,

Held at Versailles the 22d of February, 1787.

I HAVE chosen you from the different orders of the State, and have assembled you to meet me here, that I may impart to you my designs.

This has been the custom of many of my predecessors, and particularly of the chief of my family, whose name remains still dear to every Frenchman, and whose example I shall be always proud to make the rule of my conduct.

The plans, which will be communicated to you on my part, are great and important. In the first place, to improve the revenues of the State, and to secure their compleat disincumbrance by a more equal distribution of the taxes; in the next place, to liberate commerce from the various re-

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straints which impede its circulation, and to relieve, as much as circumstances will admit, that part of my subjects who are the most necessitous: such are the views which actuate me, and to which I have been determined, after the most mature deliberation; and as they all tend to the public good, I am in no fear to consult you upon their execution, sensible as I am of the zeal with which you are all animated for my service.

I will attend to, and carefully examine, the observations of which you may think them susceptible.

I expect that your deliberations, all tending to the same object, will easily accord together, and that no private views will obtrude themselves in the place of the public interest.

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Comptroller General's SPEECH.

WHAT I have at this time in command, confers on me so much the more honour, as the measures, of which the King orders me to lay before you the aggregate and the motives, are become entirely his own, through the unremitting attention which his Majesty has bestowed upon each of them, before he would adopt them.

The resolution of imparting them to you, and the paternal and affectionate terms in which he has just now addressed you, are, without question, sufficient to excite in you the justest confidence: but what ought to compleat that confidence, and add to it the most lively emotions of sensibility, is to know, with what application, with what assiduity, with what perseverance the King devoted himself to the long and laborious task which, in the first instance, the examination

of all the statements I have laid before him, to make him acquainted, in every point of view, with the real state of his finances, and then the discussion of each of the plans I submitted to him for amending them and reducing them to order, exacted from him.

After having established a marine, and rendered the French flag respectable throughout the ocean, after having protected and established the independence of a new nation, which, dismembered from a rival power, is become our ally, after having terminated an honourable war by a solid peace, and approved himself to all Europe worthy to be the moderator, the King has not delivered himself up to a sterile inactivity: His Majesty has not endeavoured to hide from himself, how much there remained for him to do for the good of his subjects, the primary object of all his cares, and the only occupation of his most ardent wishes.

To secure to his people the enjoyment of a tranquil and extensive commerce abroad ;

To procure them the advantages of a good Administration at home ;

This is what the King has proposed to himself; this is what he has never ceased to have in view.

Already

Already do the happy effects evince the wisdom of his Majesty's measures.

Already have the treaties of commerce, concluded almost in the same moment, with Holland, with England, and with Russia, banished those prohibitory principles, which were equally repugnant to the laws of society and to the reciprocal interests of nations; cemented the basis of public tranquillity; and demonstrated to all Europe, how much may be done by a prince equally just and powerful, endued with the spirit of peace and moderation, towards multiplying and strengthening the precious bonds of this universal good understanding, so much to be desired for the general interest of humanity.

Already also have our internal affairs taken that direction which clearly points to the prosperity of the state.

The exactest punctuality in fulfilling all engagements, has given that spring to public credit, which is the effect of justly merited confidence alone.

The instances of protection given to commerce, and of encouragement granted to manufactures have enlivened industry, and produced throughout that useful fermentation, the first fruits of which promise the most abundant harvest in future.

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In short, the people have experienced the commencement of relief, which it was not possible to afford sooner or more effectually, until order be established in the finances of the State.

It is this order which is the principle and the essential condition of all real œconomy; it is this, which is the true source of public prosperity.

To establish this upon a solid foundation, and to be enabled to balance the receipts against the expenditure, it was necessary to begin by settling the past, paying off the arrears, and by ordering it so as to have occasion to provide only for the current demands of the public service.

It was the only means to be extricated from the complication of accounts, and to be able to distinguish what belonged to each year, to separate the contingencies from the ordinary establishment, and to have a clear view of their actual state.

Three years have been employed in this indispensable preliminary, and these three years have not been lost.

When, at the end of 1783, the King was pleased to intrust to me the administration of his finances, they were, it is but too well known, in the most critical situation.

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The Treasury was drained, all public funds sunk, the circulation greatly checked, the alarm was general, and all public confidence destroyed.

In short, a debt of 220 millions (£. st. 9,625,000) remaining of the war; above 80 millions (£. st. 3,500,000) due, either as arrears of the current expenditure, or contracted on account of many projects formerly entered upon or executed; 176 millions (£. st. 7,700,000) anticipated upon the following year; 80 millions (£. st. 3,500,000) deficient in the balance of the revenues and ordinary expenditure; the payments to public creditors postponed; the whole making a deficiency of above 600 millions (£. st. 26,250,000) and an entire want both of money and credit.

The remembrance of it is too recent to need proof; and, besides, I have exhibited to the King all the necessary vouchers: His Majesty has seen and examined them; they are now in his hands.

At this time, money is plentiful, credit re-established, public securities risen, and the transfer of them, if they were freed and disembarrassed from the effects of stock-jobbing, (that nuisance of the present day, which, the measures adopted by His Majesty will soon exterminate,) would leave nothing else to be wished for.

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The Caisse d'Escompte has regained that estimation which was due to it, and which must increase by the extension of its utility.

The debentures on the farms, and all other such securities, are at their full value.

The debt of the war is acquitted, all the arrears are liquidated, all the expenditure is from the current account.

The payments to private persons are no longer interrupted by delay. It is, in short, made punctually to the day, and 48 millions (£. st. 2,100,000) extraordinaries, have been employed on this beneficial accommodation, which was never before known, and which was as little expected.

Thirty-two millions (£. st. 1,400,000) of the notes suspended under the late reign, (an abuse in finance not existing now,) have been paid, before their term.

The assignments, with which I found the Royal Treasury over-run, are fulfilled at the time appointed, and the liquidation of the debts of the State is advancing yearly, His Majesty having regulated it by his edict of 1784, which fixes the salutary and perpetual establishment of the sinking fund.

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In fine, the punctuality of payment has produced such confidence, and in consequence such productive resources, that not only all the dangers, with which we were threatened at the end of the year 1783, are done away, not only have the enormous debts and engagements been answered ; but, besides, ways and means have been found, to meet an infinity of unforeseen and indispensable disbursements, such as, for instance, the sums employed in preparations, and other political expences, which the affairs of Holland have made necessary, and also the assistance, the relief and the protection which the inclemency of the seasons, and various calamities in 1784 and 1785, have called for.

At the same time, His Majesty, influenced by the great and judicious consideration of its being equally important and œconomic to accelerate the works of Cherbourg, has appropriated sums to four times the amount of what was at first destined annually to that immortal undertaking, which His Majesty has consecrated by his presence in that memorable journey, when he enjoyed the solid satisfaction of receiving the blessings and the endearing acclamations of a nation, which so well understands how to value her Kings,

seeing herself so beloved by them, and the solitudes they do not cease to endure for her welfare.

The useful works of Havre, and those of Rochelle, have been pursued with the same activity. Those of Dunkirk and Dieppe have been determined and entered upon.

New canals have been opened in many provinces, and His Majesty has contributed to the undertakings.

The whole of the funds destined for the highways, and even more, have been allotted to the department of bridges and roads.

Many duties injurious to commerce, have been suppressed; and the sacrifice the King has been pleased to make of their produce, as it favours the exportation of our merchandize, is become a new source of wealth.

His Majesty has introduced, sustained, and invigorated many branches of industry, which in future will furnish the kingdom with many articles, we were before indebted to foreigners for.

Many establishments of great importance have been assisted, and received signal marks of a watchful protection; witness that, among others,

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of the iron works of Mount Cenis, the most considerable of any of the kind, and that of the whale fishery, happily begun under the most favourable auspices, at the same time that all the other fisheries of the kingdom are encouraged, are prospering, and preparing a nursery for the marine.

Our commerce in India also gains strength; the new Company are making the greatest exertions to attain the object of their establishment, and the effects of its efforts have increased in proportion to the permission the King has given them to double their capital.

In attending to every thing that relates to commerce, His Majesty has not lost sight of that which, in a kingdom depending so much on agriculture, may be called the first and most important of all manufactures, the culture of the earth. The Company which he has established to correspond, as well with the Intendants of Provinces, as with the Societies for promoting Agriculture, and private persons who have applied themselves to this object, has excited the most useful emulation, and collected the most interesting information. There are now formed country associations among the proprietors of lands, among the ecclesiastics, and among the most in-

telligent farmers, for making experiments, and giving the country people the only lessons they are capable of receiving, namely those of example.

The opening of mines, too long neglected in France, has also attracted the regard and attention of His Majesty, who knows what resources may be derived from thence. A public school, become celebrated by attracting the curiosity even of strangers, by professors distinguished for their zeal and talents, by students animated with the liveliest ardor, and by directors sent into all the provinces to make useful researches, has already spread instruction through the kingdom, and carried it even to the bottom of those repositories of subterranean riches, which are not to be obtained but by well directed efforts.

The operation upon the gold coin, by removing the disproportion that existed between the price of that metal and of silver, has produced the triple advantage of stopping the exportation of our louis, which was excessive, of reviving their circulation, which was almost stopped, and of procuring a considerable advantage to the State, accompanied at the same time with a just profit to individuals.

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If I add that there are rising, in all parts, monuments worthy to distinguish a reign, it is, that being of that kind, which unite the public utility to the decoration of the kingdom, they are entitled to national acknowledgment; and such is the character of all those of which His Majesty has ordered me to prosecute the undertaking.

The new quays with which Marseilles is now adorning, will be beneficial to commerce, as well as to the population of that ancient city.

The superb square which is building at Bourdeaux, upon the ruins of an useless fortress, will open the most convenient communications, and at the same time one of the finest prospects in the universe.

At Lyons the works intended to produce an habitable district from the bosom of a foetid marsh, were necessary for the salubrity of that rich and great town.

At Nismes, the repairing the amphitheatres will remove those unwholesome ruins which disgraced the magnificent remains of Roman grandeur.

And Aix will at last have a court of justice worthy the importance of the place.

Dunkirk

Dunkirk will find itself relieved from its long existing grievances, by the re-establishment of its sluices and its port.

In the capital, the works begun for enlarging the ancient halls, for building new and more convenient ones, for laying open the avenues to them, and for freeing the bridges of those ugly and ruinous buildings, with which they were loaded, are so many benefits, which his Majesty consecrates to humanity, much more than to glory ; and what renders these important works still more eligible is, that they will be carried on and executed by a mode, which will be neither burthensome to the Treasury, nor to the people ; by a mode, which will interfere with no established arrangements, nor retard any payments.

In effect, amidst all these undertakings, each department receives what it judges necessary for its service, each Intendant obtains the assistance he requires for his district, every creditor of the State is satisfied in his just demand ; none complain, none are unredressed, none are put off with the wretched excuse of, *the deplorable state of the finances*, which has so long been the formula of the answers of Administration.

His

His Majesty has even caused to be discharged many indemnities acknowledged to be just, but postponed to more favourable circumstances. He has done justice to every one, and has been enabled to follow the impulses of his beneficence, free from the regret of adding to the burthens of his people, without any augmentation of taxes, directly or indirectly, without establishing any new duties, nor even reviving those which had been suppressed.

By this short view of the disbursements and of the operations effected within these three years, after the decisions of the King, which bring them to the proof, you may judge, whether the expenditure has been watched with attention, and whether order has been observed in the administration of the finances. Salutary effects will not allow the presumption of corrupt causes; and whatever may be the vain opinions of ill-informed men, it is always by the greatness of the result, that the œconomy should be appreciated, in a vast administration.

I have submitted to the King the exact and minute details of whatever has been *given up, acquired, exchanged, borrowed and anticipated*, since His Majesty has deigned to intrust me with the

the finances ; I have added thereto every information, and all the vouchers of authority and office. His Majesty has examined them all ; he has kept them by him ; he is at all times furnished with the means of proving them himself ; and I am not afraid, that the most inveterate malignity can point out the omission of any thing essential in them.

It would certainly be very improper to speak of myself in this august assembly, where nothing but what regards the best interests of the state, should be attended to. But that which I have to say about œconomy, is not foreign from them ; and before His Majesty's motive to the resolutions, which he will communicate to you, is explained, it will be proper to shew, that the necessity of them ought not to be deemed the consequence of relaxation in the care of the expenditure.

Indeed the œconomy of a Minister of finance may exist in two shapes so different, that it may be said there are two sorts of œconomy.

The one strikes every eye by the austerity of the garb it wears, announces itself by flat and blunt refusals, and exhibits rigour upon the smallest occasion, in order to discourage the numerous claimants.

claimants. It has an imposing appearance that cannot stand the test of reality, but which conduces much to public opinion: it possesses the double advantage of repressing importunate solicitation, and of quieting impatient ignorance.

The other, more mindful of duty than anxious about character, can effect more, without the appearance of so much; strict and reserved in matters of importance, it does not affect austerity where there is no occasion for it; it does not seek to hide whatever it may grant, nor makes parade of whatever it may save; seeing it accessible to demands, the people are inclined to think it gratifies more than it disappoints; seeing it endeavours to soften the harshness of a refusal, they judge it incapable of a refusal; because it has not the convenient and useful reputation of inflexibility, they are apt to refuse it that of a prudent firmness; and often while, by an assiduous application to the whole detail of an immense administration, it preserves the finances from the most destructive abuses, and from the most ruinous ignorance, it seems to calumniate itself by an aspect of facility, which the propensity to slander immediately makes the characteristic of profusion.

Of what importance are appearances if the reality be incontestible? Shall we be persuaded, that there has been an access of liberality, when it is clear, from the account of last year, that the pensions, which amounted, 'tis well known, to 28 millions (£. st. 1,225,000), do not now exceed about 26 (£. st. 1,137,500), and that they must continue to decrease every year, by the execution of the regulations which His Majesty has established on the 8th of May, 1785? Shall it not be acknowledged, that, in a kingdom like France, the most certain and most extensive œconomy consists in guarding against mistakes, that a single oversight in Administration, one erroneous speculation, one miscalculated loan, one retrograde step, costs the public treasure infinitely more without being perceived, than the ostensible expences which are most talked of; and that the name of an œconomic minister belongs more properly to him, to whom no faulty operation can be imputed, than to him, who is solely occupied about savings, often more specious than real, and always more advantageous to the minister who makes a merit of them, than to the State, whose necessary splendor is incompatible with a sterile parsimony?

Moreover,

Moreover, the circumstances were urgent; I should have lost all, if I had put on the appearance of penury, at the time when it was my business to dissemble the reality of it. All my resources, at the time when the King confided to me the conduct of his finances, consisted in the public credit; it therefore demanded all my efforts to establish it. Money was scarce for want of circulation; it was necessary to promote the one, to obtain the other, and to draw forth into use that, which fear withheld concealed within; to put on the exterior of plenty, to hide the extent of our wants. The most essential thing then was to regain our lost credit; and to do that, common opinion was to be reformed. It was expedient even to anticipate demands in the exactitude of payments, that they may not appear to be tardy. 'Twas necessary to disburse vast sums, to enable us to receive still more; it was necessary to remove the terror of those sinister means, the bare apprehension of which would be a blot in a reign of which wisdom and virtue are the characteristics; in short, it was necessary to be upon a par, in the eyes of strangers, with the nations the most observant of their engagements,

and to give all Europe a just idea of the fertility of our resources.

The King, to whom I have submitted the whole, has judged of my motives, and pointed out, in consequence, the course I have followed. His Majesty has seen the utility of beginning by supporting the strength, and reanimating the vigour of the body politic, before 'twas safer to probe the inveterate ulcers, and, above all, before they were laid bare, a thing that should never be done, but when the remedy is at hand to be applied.

That is the point, in short, at which I am happily arrived. For a year past, I have laboured incessantly to gain a more perfect acquaintance with the true state of the finances than has been hitherto arrived at, and have meditated profoundly on what may be eligible in it.

It may seem very easy for a Minister of the finances to form an exact calculation of the ordinary and annual receipts and expenditure. One might suppose he may take it from the statements and estimates remitted to him at the end of every year, and which he lays before the King for the regulation of the funds of the ensuing year.

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But these statements, whatever care may have been bestowed on their construction, can serve only to illustrate the extraordinary resources of which he is able to avail himself for the service of the year for which they are made; nothing can be concluded from thence, precise or certain, of the ordinary situation. The prodigious number of heterogeneous and variable parts of which they are composed, the complication of the different accounts, the confusion arising from the local deductions upon the collections that are more or less retarded, the new assessments of the tax upon deposits and assignments, brought over from one year to another, the infinite number of unforeseen causes which may change the order of the expenditure and of the reimbursements; in short, the almost inevitable confusion of the arrear of the current with the future, of the fixed with the eventual, of what is only the result of transferring with what should be taken for effective; all these causes together render it very difficult to distinguish what belongs to each year, and to form a just estimate of their ordinary and annual state.

Persuaded as I am of the great importance of being acquainted with these things, and that the
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instructing the King in them without any reserve, is the indispensable duty of my place, at the same time that it is serving according to his own principles a Monarch who loves truth, I have neglected nothing which could assist me in submitting to his inspection a general view of his finances, of which I could vouch for the exactitude. I have there sedulously distinguished, by columns, the revenues in the gross, the deductions they suffer before they are brought to the Royal Treasury, and their net amount, as it is paid in there every year.

I have followed the same order in the expenditure; I have separated the extraordinaries from those that are to be looked upon as annual; I have comprised in these the parts that were acquitted on the spot, and I have classed them all according to the date and assignment, and according to the periods to which they have reference.

These accounts, stated in two points of view, one for the year 1787, the other for an ordinary year, exhibit an exact balance of the annual receipts and expenditure: I have laid them before the King, illustrated by sixty-three particular statements, giving the detail of all the articles; and His Majesty, who has been pleased to study them

them minutely with that application which he never refuses to whatever has a just claim to it, is at this time better acquainted with the true state of his finances than any other man in his kingdom.

The result of this knowledge is subject to no doubt, but affords him at the same time matter of much concern.

I must allow it, and do not wish to disguise the truth of it, the annual deficiency is very considerable. I have explained to the King the origin, the progress, and the causes of it.

The origin of it is very ancient. There has existed in France a deficiency for ages. The operations of Mr. Law, so ruinous to private fortunes, ought at least to have advanced the finances of the State to a clear balance: but this object was not obtained, and even under the œconomic administration of Cardinal Fleury, it was not feasible. This is not the received opinion, but it is the truth, and it is proved by a statement, at the Royal Treasury, of the accounts of that Minister, that in his time the deficiency always existed.

Its progress was become alarming under the late reign. The deficiency exceeded 74 millions
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(£. ft. 3,237,500), when the Abbé Terray was called to the administration of the finances; and it was still at 40 (£. ft. 1,750,000), when he left it. 'Tis true, that in the memorial he gave the King in 1774, accompanied with a statement of the receipts and expenditure for the same year, he made the annual deficiency only 27,800,000 livres (£. ft. 1,216,250); but it is known and proved by the effective account of that same year, that in reality it was then at 40,200,000 (£. ft. 1,758,750).

This difference confirms what I have said of the difficulty of forming an exact balance between the ordinary receipts and expenditure.

The finances were therefore still greatly deranged, when His Majesty mounted the throne. They remained nearly in the same disorder, until the year 1776, a period at which the deficiency was computed to be 37 millions (£. ft. 1,618,750) by the person himself who shortly after was charged with the management of the finances.

From that time to the month of May 1781, the augmenting the fleet and the exigencies of the war obliged us to borrow 440 millions (£. ft. 19,250,000).

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It is evident that the product of all the reforms and all the improvements, which were made in that interval, whatever they might have been set at, have not been efficient to balance, by a great deal, the encrease of expenditure, necessarily resulting from the interest of the loans, which must always be calculated at either nine or ten per cent. as they are either of the nature of life annuities, or are borrowed on funds, in which provision is made for a gradual discharge of the capital, and of course risen to above 40 millions (£. ft. 1,750,000) per ann. So that the deficiency is encreased, and effective accounts prove it so.

It has also encreased from the month of May 1781, to the month of November 1783; and it is not to be wondered at, since the loans made during that space will amount to about 450 millions (£. ft. 19,687,500).

I have stated, that, at the end of 1783, the deficiency amounted to eighty millions, (£. ft. 3,500,000).

There were besides, 176 millions (£. ft. 7,700,000) of anticipations, which I had comprised in the aggregate of the debts, when I said that, at that period, they amounted to above 600 millions

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(£. ft. 26,250,000). It appears by the statements laid before the King, that they amounted to 604 millions (£. ft. 26,425,000); so that adding to them the annual deficiency of 80 millions (£. ft. 3,500,000), I can affirm with truth, that in 1784 the whole arrear amounted to 684 millions (£. ft. 29,925,000).

I have not been able, nor ought I to make this deficiency fall intirely upon that year alone; it was necessary to throw part of it upon the services of the following years; and one may easily imagine how difficult that transfer, joined to the annual deficiency, must have made them: it is easy to see, how much the loans made at the end of the years 1783, 1784, and 1785, even adding to them that made by the city of Paris in December 1786, are below what I was necessitated to pay, and it cannot be wondered at, that to assist it, it was unavoidable for me to avail myself of other resources of credit, less direct, less ostensible, but all expressly approved by His Majesty, to whom their motives and application are well known.

The uniting all these modes of credit, which have been used as sparingly as possible, do not raise a sum nearly equal to the acquittances
which

which have been effected in the course of these three years: 'twas order, oeconomy, and the arrangements, of which a great concern is always susceptible, that did the rest, and the whole is now cleared.

But it does not follow from this, nevertheless, that the annual deficiency has not still encreased: the causes are too public to allow the effects to remain a secret.

These causes are all explained by one single observation. The deficiency was, at the end of 1776, 37 millions (£. st. 1,618,750); and since that period, to the end of 1786, there have been borrowed 1250 millions (£. st. 54,687,500).

It is well known, how necessary these loans were. To them it is that we owe a formidable fleet. By them we have gloriously sustained a war, which, from its principle and its object, has with reason been called *a national war*; by means of them, the seas have been enfranchised; in short, we have procured, by them, a solid and durable peace, which is likely to give sufficient time to adjust all that derangement, which so enormous an expenditure has caused in the finances.

But it would give a very exaggerated idea of the present deficiency, in calculating its amount,

to add the interest of all these loans to the amount of the former annual deficiency. On one side, the King's revenue is augmented, as well from the produce of the *sol per livre* imposed in 1781, as by the considerable supplies lately obtained by the renewal of the leases of the different finance companies; on the other side, there were, at least, 250 millions (£. ft. 10,937,500) of reimbursements, which have diminished the interest in proportion, and according to the order laid down, as well for those of the reimbursements which are for fixed periods, as for those which are regulated by the sinking fund, in the course of the next ten years, a capital of above 400 millions (£. ft. 17,500,000) will be extinguished, after which, the King will enter upon the free enjoyment of above 60 millions (£. ft. 2,625,000) of revenue, sunk at this time, as well in the assigned reimbursements, as in interest.

But until then, that is to say, till the end of 1797, it is impossible to suffer the state to remain in the constant and imminent danger, to which a deficiency, such as the present, exposes it; impossible to go on, year after year, applying palliatives and expedients, which, though they may retard the crisis for a time, are sure to render it
more

more fatal at last ; impossible to do any good, to adopt any plan of œconomy, to procure the people that relief which the King's goodness designs them, so long as the present disorder remains.

'Twas my duty to announce it, 'twas my duty to exhibit this melancholy truth to the King; it has engaged his whole attention, and His Majesty is perfectly convinced of the necessity of employing the most efficacious means to remedy it.

But what can these means be?

To go on borrowing would but aggravate the evil, and precipitate the ruin of the state.

To lay on more taxes would be to crush the people, whom the King wishes to relieve.

To continue to anticipate, that has been but too much the practice already, and prudence requires that the present load of anticipations should be lightened every year.

To use œconomy, that must certainly be done; His Majesty approves it, he practises it, he will continue to do so still more. All possible retrenchments of expence, even to his own household, all those of which the different departments are susceptible without enervating the state, he has already resolved upon, and his resolutions are always

ways followed with effect : but œconomy alone, suppose it ever so rigorous, would be insufficient, and can be considered as a secondary means only.

I have no idea of enumerating amongst our resources, that which, by subverting credit, would ruin all. Which the King's immutable fidelity to his engagements, will not permit him to look upon in the light of possibility, and which would be as repugnant to his inclination as to his justice.

What is to be done then to fill up this frightful void, and produce the desired level?

What remains that can possibly supply all that is wanted, and procure that which the restauration of the finances requires?

The correction of abuses.

It is in the correction of abuses that a fund of riches is to be found, which the state has a right to appropriate, and which should be converted to the purpose of restoring order. It is there that the only means of supplying all exigencies are to be found. It is from the very bosom of disorder, that must issue the fruitful source which will fertilize every part of the monarchy.

These abuses have for their supporters, interest, credit, property, and the antient prejudices which antiquity seems to have given a sanction to: but
what

what should avail the union of these against the public good and the necessities of the state?

The greatest of all abuses would be, to begin with those only of small importance, those, which, existing only among the poor, can oppose but a faint resistance to their reformation, but of which the reformation can produce no salutary resource.

The abuses, which the business of this day goes to annihilate, for the public good, are the most considerable, the most protected, and such as have the deepest root, and the most luxuriant branches.

These are the abuses, the existence of which weighs heaviest upon the useful and laborious classes; the abuses of pecuniary privileges, the exceptions to the common law, and so many unjust exceptions, which relieve one part of those who should contribute, and aggravate the burthens of the other.

The general inequality in apportioning the subsidies, and the enormous disproportion which exists in the contributions of the different provinces, and in the burthens of the subjects of the same Sovereign:

The rigour and arbitrary construction in levying the Taille:

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The fear, the constraint, and the something like dishonour, under which, the commerce in the produce of the earth labours :

The Custom-houses for levying the internal duties of entry, and those barriers which render the different parts of the kingdom strangers one to another :

The duties which discourage industry, those which are excessively expensive in the collecting, and require a vast number of officers, those which have a tendency to encourage smuggling, and which, every year, are the destruction of thousands of citizens :

The diminution of the Royal Domaine, and the little benefit which is derived from the small remains of it :

The waste of the royal forests, and the faults in their administration :

In short, all that discourages the produce, all that enfeebles the resources of credit, all that renders the revenues unproductive, and all the superfluous expences which absorb it.

If so many abuses, the constant subject of censure, have till now obtained, in defiance of universal condemnation, and of the efforts of the Ministers, who have attempted to remedy them,

them, it is because partial eadeavours were improperly substituted for general exertions, it is because 'twas supposed possible to remove the disorder, without first removing the cause, 'tis because 'twas attempted to perfect the general Administration of the State, without correcting its discordances, without reducing it to that principle of uniformity, which can alone remove all the difficulties of detail, and reanimate the entire body of the monarchy.

The plans, which the King is about to communicate to you, all tend to this object: it is neither a new system nor a new invention, it is but resumed, and bringing together the different projects of public utility, long since conceived by the most able men of the state, often presented in perspective by Government itself, of which some parts have been tried, and of which the whole seems to unite the suffrages of the nation; but of which, also, the execution has, till now, appeared impracticable, by the difficulty of reconciling such a multitude of local usages, of pretensions, privileges and interests clashing one with another.

When it is considered by what successive steps, by the reunion of how many countries variously

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governed,

governed, the kingdom is arrived at its present grandeur, one cannot be surprised at the disparity of the mode of administration, at the multitude of heterogeneous forms, and the incoherence of the principles, which disunite all the parts.

It was not in the bosom of ignorance and confusion, whose veil overshadowed the times of our first Kings ;

It was not, when the kings, insecure upon their thrones, were entirely occupied in repelling the continual usurpations of overgrown subjects ;

It was not in the midst of the disorder and anarchy of the feudal system, when a band of petty tyrants, issuing from their fortified castles, committed the most atrocious depredations, overturned all the principles of the constitution, and interposed their chimerical pretensions between the sovereign and his subjects ;

It was not, when the rage for crusades, enflamed by the double enthusiasm of religion and glory, carried into the other hemisphere the strength, the gallantry, and the misfortunes of France ;

It was not, when a Prince, who obtained the surname of Auguste, recovered the principal dismemberments of his kingdom, and augmented
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its power and splendor; nor when the gloomy politics of one of his successors, by giving extension to a municipal government, prepared the means of uniting, in the hand of the sovereign, all the power of the public strength; nor when the Monarch, the most eager after glory, and the bravest of knights, contended with a rival sovereign for the renown they both acquired at the expence of their people;

It was not in these turbulent and inauspicious times, when fanaticism, rending the bosom of the state, filled it with horror and calamity; nor when that good King, so dear to Frenchmen, conquered his kingdom at the point of his sword, and was taken up in adjusting the long disorders and the disastrous effects of the civil wars;

It was not, when all the energy of an able and formidable minister was concentrated in the double design of restraining the ambition of a power become formidable to Europe, and of securing the tranquillity of France, by establishing the monarchical power;

Neither was it under that brilliant reign, when the beneficent intentions of a great Monarch were too often thwarted by ruinous wars, when the state was impoverished by victories, while the

kingdom was depopulated by persecution, where so much care was bestowed upon giving every thing an air of grandeur, that the solid prosperity of the state was always neglected :

In short, it was not before the monarchy had extended its limits to the points nature had ordained to bound them, before she had arrived at her maturity, and the calm, both within and without, was securely established by the wisdom and moderation of her Sovereign, that it was possible to indulge a thought of reforming the defects of the constitution, and of endeavouring to render the general administration more uniform.

It was reserved for a King, young, virtuous, and who is not governed by any other passion than that of promoting the happiness of his subjects, by whom he is adored, to undertake, after close examination, and to execute with an unalterable determination, that which no one of his predecessors could accomplish, namely, to fix a relation and connexion, among all the members of the body politic, to perfect their organization, and finally to fix the foundation of prosperity, unalterable.

It is to obtain this end, that, dwelling upon the idea, the most simple and the most natural, namely,

namely that of the unity of principle, which is the thing to be wished for in justice, and the source of good order, he has applied it to objects the most essential to the administration of his kingdom, and that he is assured, by a long meditation upon the consequences which should result from it, that he would find in it the double advantage of augmenting his revenues, and of relieving his people.

The general view has led His Majesty to consider, first, the various forms of administration which have obtained in the different provinces of the kingdom, where there is no convocation of the states. To prevent in future the assessments of the public charges from being partial and arbitrary, he has determined to confide the care of them to the proprietors themselves; and he has drawn from the fundamental principles of the monarchy an uniform plan of deliberations, according to which, the result of the opinions of the persons who bear the burthen of the state, and their observations upon whatever is interesting to them, shall be transmitted from the *parochial* assemblies to those of the *district*, from these to the *provincial* assemblies, and from them to the throne.

His

His Majesty then applied himself to consider, with a most minute attention, how to establish the same principle of uniformity, and proportionate equality, in the assessing the territorial impost, which he looks upon as the basis, and what ought to be the standard, of all the other contributions.

He has discovered from the accounts which he has caused to be laid before him, the manner in which the twentieths are at present collected, that, instead of their being assessed, as they ought to be, upon the whole of the lands of his kingdom, without exception, in a just ratio of their value and produce, they have become subject to infinite inequality, which is tolerated, but not sanctioned by law; that the lands of the states have got rid of it by inadequate compositions; that credit and opulence have by indirect means accomplished an exemption in part from it, which less ability has sustained the full rigour of; that the examinations into the value of lands conducted in a manner always disgusting to the proprietors, and often interrupted and incomplete in its execution, could not afford a certain rule to fix it by; in short, that the results of this general imposition, instead of affording government the information essentially
 necessary,

necessary, respecting the productions of the kingdom, and the comparative view of the ability of each province, only serve to evince the distressing inequality of their respective charges, and do not render a product nearly equal to the value announced by the very denomination of this tax.

His Majesty has judged, that the means for remedying these inconveniencies by the sole application of distributive justice, for restoring the imposts to their fundamental principle, for raising them to their true value, and not to oppress any one, but even afford relief to the people, and for rendering all privilege inapplicable to the mode of collection, would be to substitute a general subsidy in the place of the vingtièmes, which, embracing the whole extent of the kingdom, would consist in a proportional contribution of all the produce, either in kind, where things will admit of it, or else in money, where they will not, and not to admit of any exception, not even with regard to his Domaine, nor any other distinction, than such as result from the different qualities of the soil, and the variety of the productions.

Ecclesiastical property must necessarily be comprised in this general subsidy, which, to be just, ought to include the whole extent of lands, as
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does the protection, of which it is the price. But, that this property may not be overcharged, in continuing to pay the tenths which are levied for the debt of the clergy, the King, the sovereign protector of the churches of his kingdom, has determined to provide a reimbursement of that debt, by granting to the clergy proper authority to free themselves from it.

In following up the same principle of justice, which admits of no exception with regard to the territorial impost, His Majesty has found it equitable, that the higher orders of his state, who are in possession of honorary distinctions, which he purposes to secure to them, and which he even wishes them in future a fuller enjoyment of, should be exempted from every kind of personal tax, and, of course, that they do not in future pay the capitation, the nature of which, and even the name seems incompatible with their rank.

His Majesty would have wished, that the product of the territorial tribute, which is to take place of the Vingtièmes, would enable him, from this time, to alleviate the grievance of the tax, as much as he would desire to do.

He well knows how heavy this imposition and the arbitrary mode of its collection, weigh on the
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most indigent part of his subjects; and though his wisdom must suspend the perfect accomplishment of his beneficent views, till he shall know the result of the new form of collecting the land tax, and till the provincial administrations shall have informed him of the method of regulating the distribution of the tax, he will at least begin by correcting the principal defects, and not postpone the commencement of his people's relief, in a reduction upon the gross mass of this impost.

The entire liberty of commerce in grain, resolved on in favour of agriculture and landed property, under the sole reserve of acquiescing in the demands of any of the provinces that shall judge it necessary to stop, for a time, the exportation of it abroad, and without the paternal solicitude of the King, for all that regards the subsistence of his people, ceasing to bestow on this momentous object, the useful and never disagreeable cares of an unperceived watchfulness:

The abolition of the *Corvée* * in kind, and the conversion of this, too hard, exaction, to a pecu-

* *Corvée* in France means the obligation upon the inhabitants to work a certain number of days upon the public roads without wages.

niary composition, dispensed with more justice, and appropriated to a purpose inviolably fixed :

The freedom of interior traffic, the removing the Custom-houses to the frontiers, the establishment of an uniform Tarif, calculated to advance the interests of commerce, the abolition of many duties detrimental to industry, or too productive of grievances, and the alleviating the burthen of the Gabelle *, which I never have mentioned to His Majesty, without his being sensibly touched with regret for the impossibility of entirely exonerating his subjects from it :

These are so many salutary operations, which enter into the plan, of which His Majesty will communicate to you the detail, and which all contribute to promote order and uniformity, of which they are the basis.

After having directed his principal attention to these great objects, the King turned his thoughts to the means of accelerating the liquidation of the public debt ; a thing already certain, from the invariable assignment of the monies produced each

* A tax upon salt, which is aggravated by the arbitrary mode of rating it, which is not according to the quantity of salt actually consumed in each family, but according to the presumed property of the consumer.

year by the sinking fund, and from the perpetual appropriation of the progressive fund, resulting from compound interests of the different extinctions.

His Majesty has considered that his Domaines, of which a great part is long since sunk in mortgages, assignments, and bounties of every sort, and of which the trifling residue, though better managed of late years, is taken up in the support of the charges and expences, which absorb the half of their produce, can never attain in his hands to a value proportionally equal to that of private estates; that they have been, and will be perpetually, besieged with a number of claims, from which the goodness of a sovereign, the most cautious in his bounties, will have great difficulty to defend them, and that it is possible to draw from them a much greater advantage by means of enfeoffment, since, without diminution of revenue, and by preserving their sovereignty, which is a right essentially inalienable, their produce may promote the extinction of a part of the debts contracted by the state.

His Majesty has not judged it expedient to adopt the like method with regard to his forests; he will reserve the entire right of them, and pro-

poses to improve the rents of them, by a more direct management, less inconvenient to the public, and less expensive than that of the present.

You will see, in the result, the influence of these several operations, in regard to His Majesty's finances; you shall be made acquainted with some dispositions, which are more directly relative thereto, and which tend, some to amend the collections by means that will be less burthensome, such as a more exact collection of the stamp duties; and others, to make all possible retrenchments in the expences of them, and by all these means to obtain that equilibrium, without which there can exist neither true œconomy, nor solid power, nor durable tranquility.

The care which the King has taken to extend the operations of the Caisse d'Escompte, to render them more useful to commerce, and to augment, at the same time, the security of its engagements, will perfectly convince you, how attentive His Majesty is to every thing that can procure any advantage to his subjects, how much he watches over the public interest.

You will perceive, in short, in the aggregate of the plan, upon the execution of which His Majesty wishes to consult you, that it is so conducive
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to good order, so necessary for the redress of abuses, and so advantageous for the people, that the adoption of it is most desirable, even though the finances did not so absolutely require it.

Who can doubt the dispositions with which you come to devote yourselves to these weighty concerns? Invited by the King to the honourable function of cooperating with him in his beneficent views, animated with sentiments of the purest patriotism, which, in all Frenchmen's hearts, is founded upon the love of their sovereign, and the love of honour, you will have no other object to attend to, but the good of the nation, whose attention is fixed upon you.

You will remember, that the fate of the kingdom is at stake, and that from ordinary means neither the good purposes of the King can be answered, nor the mischiefs averted which he wishes to remove.

The observations that you will present to His Majesty, will have for their end the promotion and perfection of his plans, they will be inspired with zeal, and accompanied with expressions of acknowledgment, due to a Monarch, who adopts
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no projects but such as tend to the relief of his people, who unites himself to his subjects, who consults, and who shews himself to them only as a father.

Let others recal that maxim of our monarchy,
The pleasure of the King is the law : the maxim
 of His Majesty is, *The happiness of the people is
 the pleasure of the King.*

F I N I S